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# Madison Cultural Plan seeks public input for improving arts and culture

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The [Madison Cultural Plan](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, an initiative to restructure and promote the arts and culture in Madison, held the last of its scheduled public meetings at Lakeview Branch Library on Thursday night.

About 12 community members, local artists and city employees attended the meeting, providing feedback and voicing concerns regarding the Cultural Plan's goals and executive summary report released earlier this fall.

First proposed in 2003, the Madison Culture Plan is a five-year plan to increase access to the arts in Madison, Karin Wolf, arts program administrator of the Madison Arts Commission, said during the meeting.

The Cultural Plan takes a broad definition of the arts, including art, performance, sciences and history as part of the culture of Madison.

Wolf, who led the meeting, said Madison needs more connectivity between the many artistic and cultural entities within the city, a key finding of the report.

"Madison lacks connective tissue that connects art, artists and the resources they need to be artists in this town," Wolf said.

Developing a comprehensive database of information for artists and organizations to connect with one another could be one solution to the problem, she added.

This database would provide regularly updated information on local classes, practice space, resources, and other opportunities, all in one place.

For example, an artist looking for a new studio space could access the database to find one. Similarly, a teacher interested in having a hip-hop program in their classroom could easily find a local organization or teacher to partner with.

Many attendees at the meeting agreed the database would be an asset to the city.

Increasing connectivity through projects like the database will largely depend on structural changes in the creative sector identified in the Cultural Plan report.

Three structure shifts suggested in the report include: restructuring and strengthening the Madison Arts Commission's purpose and role, forming a Creative Initiatives Staff Team to support the city's arts, and lastly, creating a public/private/creative sector partnership to further develop the city's creative sector and connections.

The development of the public/private/creative sector would focus on linking arts organizations, local schools, artists, local government, investors and donors, the report said.

The Cultural Plan is still in its early stages, however, and the Plan's summary report will now circulate at multiple Madison boards for discussion and recommendations.

This early stage of development provides opportunities for community feedback and recommendations before the Plan's Steering Committee, which guided the plan's progress, makes final decisions on the report at their next meeting in March.

At the meeting, the committee will decide whether to rewrite the report or attach an addendum to it, Wolf said. They will then submit their final report to the Madison Common Council for approval.

Until then, however, the Steering Committee is open to suggestions.

During Thursday's meeting, one concern raised by Madison resident and mosaic artist, Eric Rattan, was the lack of public art and city regulations on it.

Others at the meeting voiced similar thoughts.

Rattan has lived in Madison for 22 years but has, by choice, worked mostly outside the city, because he says city barriers constrain local artists' ability to complete works of public art, such as signs or murals.

Rattan cited his own struggles to obtain a permit for a local neighborhood sign as an example.

Meeting attendees also raised concerns about the general attitude towards the arts in Madison, arguing that the arts are not viewed as an essential part of the city.

Alder Bridget Maniaci, who attended the meeting, said the city needed to create "a culture of 'yes'" when dealing with local artists interested in creating public works or organizing events.

From city services to artists, Madison has a lot of different entities involved in the arts, Anne Katz, Chair of the Cultural Plan Steering Committee and Director of Arts Wisconsin, said.

With so many individuals and organizations, Katz, who led the meeting alongside Wolf, said Madison has inequity in how people access the arts and how those arts are distributed throughout the city.

“There’s a lot of stuff of all sizes, shapes and costs, but its not really in any kind of a system,” Katz said during the meeting. “A lot of this plan is about opening those pathways to be able to get creative people together to get audiences to access the arts all at once.”

*To learn more about the Madison Cultural Plan visit their [website](#) [2] or read the [report](#) [3].*

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